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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a proposed model for providing educational services to students with autism and other pervasive developmental disorders (PDD). The model was developed by special education administrators in response to significant increases in the number of students diagnosed with PDD. Services that are necessary to support a classroom for students with autism and PDD include early diagnosis and intervention, discrete-trial teaching techniques, sensory integration activities, parent involvement and support, inclusive opportunities with peers, intensive language and socialization training, and training in generalization skills. The proposed model would include weekly staff training sessions, which would also incorporate student progress reviews and three prescheduled individualized educational plan meetings for each student during the school year. A home-based support component would include an "after school" or community-based recreation program to enable students to practice social and language skills; monthly family support groups to encourage parents to address emotional issues regarding autism; weekly training sessions for family members on teaching, parenting, and behavior management techniques; 2 hours of daily home-based tutoring; coordination between home and school in order to encourage communication between parents and school staff and monitor student progress; assistance to family members and school staff on locating information and resources on autism; and extended school year or summer programs to provide additional learning and social opportunities for autistic children. (LP)

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A LOCAL SCHOOL MODEL FOR TEACHING STUDENTS WITH PDD AND AUTISM

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Introduction

This **LOCAL SCHOOL MODEL** for teaching students with PDD and autism was developed as a response to the request of Special Education Directors who are exploring effective educational alternatives for their students diagnosed with autism, PDD, Asperger's Syndrome or related conditions. Some of their schools have experienced significant increases in the number of students with these diagnoses. Special education administrators who formerly might have encountered 1 child with PDD each year might now identify 5 students with autism related diagnoses coming into their schools the following year. These special education administrators recognized the need for advanced educational planning for these children and initiated a series of exploratory meetings. These meetings were held out of recognition of the significant obstacles facing any new program in today's complex school environment. These exploratory meetings provided a forum to discuss ways to meet the educational needs of these students as well as to discuss appropriate ways to extend their services beyond the typical school day. Options which might not have been plausible a few years ago now seemed realistic. Many educators of autistic students have identified a need for "Extended day" or "Home-Based" services which would benefit the students by:

a) protecting the educational progress made to date;
b) increasing the amount of skill training and, therefore, the likelihood of educational progress towards the objectives in the student's current Individualized Educational Plan (IEP);
c) contributing to an integrated effort to prevent the need for "Out-of-District" Placements;
d) integrating the child's family and natural social support system into efforts to build social and communication skills.

The exploratory and planning meetings were necessary because the demonstration of "need" may not of itself be sufficient to establish a new and complex program.

Intensive early treatment and education greatly improves the outlook for children with developmental disabilities (Shonkoff, J.P., and Hauser-Cram, P, 1986). Some educators (Lovaas 1987) estimate that as much as 30-40 hours per week of discrete trial 1:1 teaching may be required for these students to realize their potential. While there are numerous program models for these children (Handleman and Harris , 1994), until recently, only specialized schools or

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residential placements for students with autism could provide anything like that degree of relevant training by qualified staff.

Program Elements

What follows is an outline (Powers, 1992) of services necessary to support a classroom for students with autism or autistic like traits. Clearly, not every school district would need the same array of services but would only need to augment the services they already provide. This outline is based on the following considerations:

1. Early Diagnosis and Intervention;
2. Discrete trial teaching techniques;
3. Sensory Integration activities;
4. Parent involvement and support;
5. Inclusive opportunities with typical peers.
6. Intensive language training;
7. Intensive socialization training;
8. Teaching generalization skills;

I. Staff Training

As in most effective program models, there will be an ongoing series of Training and Orientation Sessions on topics such as:

Confidentiality	Inclusive Techniques with Autistic Students
Precision Teaching	Correct use of Reinforcement and Punishment
Discrete Trial Teaching	Physical Interventions
Designing Behavioral Objectives	Functioning on a Team
Integrative Language Training	Social Integration
Data Recording	Data Analysis

These sessions will be conducted weekly in an afternoon session which will also include student progress reviews and **3 prescheduled IEP meetings for each student throughout the school year.**

II. Supportive Services

These services include:

1) Parent Support....which would provide an opportunity for **parents** and **siblings** to address their emotional issues around the autistic child;
2) Parent Training ....about the nature of autism, the services the child is likely to require, and behavior management and teaching techniques.;
3) Home-School Coordination....to maintain communications and cooperation;
4) Technical Assistance in Aspects of Autism....to improve the efficacy of teachers and parents around highly specific topics such as language training; and ,
5) Behavior Management.....at home or in school.

Besides the "Home-Based" services mentioned above, there will also be an after school component that would support the child's social and communication skill's progress in a natural way. One such natural after school component is **Community Based Recreation.** Community Based Recreation programs offer autistic children a natural connection to peers in their home community in settings that let the child practice the social, communication, and instructional skills they have drilled during the school day. Community Based Recreation programs are held in local YMCA's, gymnasiums, swimming pools and parks and offer students structured opportunities to learn and to participate in a wide range of games, sports, and community events. The following service model includes Community Based Recreation as one component of an over all "After School" and "Home-Based Service Support" model for autistic students.

A Model for Home-Based Support Services

1. "After School" or Community Based Recreation Activities

Each student will be included in a supervised and structured Community Based Recreation program. This Program will occur each school day shortly after the end of school and will last for approximately 1 hour. A recreation therapist from the local YMCA will design and supervise each activity assisted by teaching assistants. The activities will be selected to offer opportunities for students to practice specific skills which are part being developed during school sessions as designated by their IEP's. The Community Based Recreation Activities are intended to supplement the structured recess built into the daily schedule.

2. Family Support Groups

Weekly family support visits and monthly **Family Support Groups** are scheduled to provide a nexus for communication between the parents and staff and among groups of parents. These sessions will provide an opportunity for parents to express their concerns, compare problems and solutions, to network on family issues, and to learn useful strategies. These sessions will occur at the school site and will include staff members where appropriate. There is likely to be a need for support to the brothers and sisters of the diagnosed children in the form of Individual and Group Sibling Support.

3. Family Training

There will be weekly training sessions for family members on teaching, parenting, and behavior management techniques. These **Family Training Sessions** will coincide with monthly Parent Support Groups. These sessions will be practical and realistic, based on actual issues raised by family members. Initially there will need to be weekly training sessions for family members. Later, as each individual family acquires basic understanding and skill, this training might be held in groups. Skilled family members have been shown to be crucial in effectively teaching autistic students (Deal, A., Dunst, C. and Trivette, 1988). According to Schreibman, L., Kaneko, W., and Koegel, R. (1991):

"Parent training has been shown to be effective in affecting a wide variety of behavior changes in these children and to promote generalization of training effects."

In other words, trained parents augment the school day academic training and lead the way in teaching social and self-help skills.

4. Home-Based Tutoring

While some researchers have determined that as much as 37 hours per week of Home-Based 1:1 tutoring is necessary for maximizing the progress of autistic students (e.g. Lovaas, I., 1987), the practical problems of locating and training appropriate in-home trainers are formidable. It is unlikely that classroom teachers can offer the amount of precision 1:1 teaching and corrective opportunities that an autistic student requires. Therefore, it is necessary to support the school day teaching effort with Home-Based Tutoring. The current proposal suggests 2 hours per day of Home-Based tutoring per student be provided by the classroom teaching assistants or other in-home teaching assistants.

5. Home-School Coordination

As the student's skill repertoire increases in social or cognitive complexity the importance of Home-School Coordination grows. While the progress of any student is enhanced with coordination between home, school, and community, the progress of autistic students is often critically dependent upon it (Koegel, R., Koegel, L., and Schreibman, L., 1991). Medication, tantrum, self-abuse, social, and language issues of autistic students bear close monitoring for improved chances of success.

6. Technical Assistance in Aspects of Autism

The Autism Support Center maintains a file of nearly 2000 journal articles, books and video tapes. Professionals throughout New England attend our workshops and avail themselves of our technical resources. Many of the questions or concerns which the staff at the have about teaching autistic students can be answered through use of these resources.

7. Extended School Year or Summer Program

Students with autism have notoriously poor retention over long periods of time. Summer programs for these students are tremendously successful and safeguard everyone's investment in their educational progress. While these summer programs may not always be as intensive as their regular school year programs, they do provide additional learning and social opportunities in structured learning environments, compatible with the student's regular programs.

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